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*The American POWs: THEIR GLORY IS ALL MOONSHINE**

by Ngo Vinh Long

American POWs have been welcomed back to "The World," as they call it, with "little touches," tax-free bonanzas, and much fanfare. The "little touches" have included kisses from flight nurses, cakes baked aboard, American cigarettes chewing gum, "Halloween bags" of candy, and "very fancy flowered towels." The tax-free bonanzas come in the form of cold cash, grab bags of gifts, and special job offers. And the fanfare goes on every day with marching bands, press conferences and live TV coverage. All this joy prompted Howard K. Smith of ABC to comment that the attention and care paid to the POWs proved the great humanity of the American people. Once again he condemned those who refused to acknowledge this national quality of munificence. His sentiments are shared by many Americans.

Some, to be sure, have pointed out that this great American humanity has been extended only to a rather select group of professional soldiers and civilian personnel while those Americans who bore the brunt of this war, the veterans, have been at best subjected to "benign neglect." Moreover, the celebrations have served to cover up and justify the inhumane policies of the United States against the Indo-Chinese people—the gooks, the dinks, the slant-eyes, the Oriental human beings. The TV networks, indeed, paid almost as much attention to the dog brought back from Hanoi by a POW as they have to political prisoners in South Vietnam.

* I am tired and sick of war. Its glory is all moonshine. It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood, more vengeance, more desolation. War is hell.

—William Tecumseh Sherman

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There is no doubt that on the personal level there is a need to forgive and forget after a war. And nobody understands this more than the Vietnamese themselves. But the very way in which the United States treats its POWs as heroes suggests that it is proud of their actions and the criminal policies of the U.S. government. And,

indeed, the POWs themselves have scarcely been inclined to recant their complicity in war crimes. Col. Robinson Risner, for example, was quoted by the *New York Times* (February 27, 1973) in support of President Nixon's handling of the war—including the saturation raids last Christmas against Hanoi, Haiphong and other populated areas of North Vietnam. The colonel recalled: "On the 18th of December—I think that was the first night of the B-52 raids—there was never such joy seen in our camp before. We knew they were B-52's and that President Nixon was keeping his word and that the Communists were getting the message. . . . They at last knew that we had some weapons they had not felt, and that President Nixon was willing to use those weapons in order to get us out of Vietnam."

Whether, in fact, the bombing hastened the return of the American POWs is a highly debatable question. Asked about this at his January 24 press conference, Kissinger said that he did not "want to speculate on North Vietnamese motives; I have too much trouble analyzing our own." In any event, Col. Risner and his friends were overjoyed because as pilots they understood full well the destructiveness of the B-52's. Each B-52 typically carries about 20 tons of 500-pound bombs. It flies at an altitude of 30,000 feet and drops bombs which cover "a rectangle a mile and a half long and a half mile wide with flames and flying steel fragments." (*New York Times*, December 26, 1972.) If there is no overlap, 100 B-52's can thus destroy an area of about 34 square miles, or 32,000 acres, in a single mission. During the 11-day bombing, over 100 B-52s and several hundred fighter bombers devastated North Vietnam 24 hours a day. By December 24, the sixth day of the bombing, about 40,000 tons of munitions had been dumped on the populated areas of the

Red River Delta of North Vietnam. The area cratered by the bombing in these first few days was equal to that which would be devastated by about one hundred Hiroshima bombs.

The Red River Delta is North Vietnam's heartland. Some 12.5 million people live there in an area of about 2 million acres. In this region is located most of North Vietnam's farmland and here most of its food is produced. Here, too, is where the danger of floods during the rainy season is greatest, a danger prevented only by a dike system painfully constructed over a period of a thousand years.

The captured American pilots certainly knew the importance of the Red River Delta: for years they had bombed the area. No doubt they understood the results of the brutal onslaught over the Christmas vacation when hundreds of people died, thousands of homes were devastated, and whole cities such as Bac Giang totally destroyed. According to Col. Risner, they greeted this destruction with unprecedented joy.

As for the civilian POWs, almost all were operatives of the Agency for International Development (AID) and in Vietnam, AID is inseparable from the CIA. Its funds have furnished torture chambers, built prisons, supplied the Saigon police, and assassinated political opponents of the Thieu regime. These Americans are hardly innocent do-gooders. Consider, for example, Douglas K. Ramsey, whom Peter Arnett and Seymour Hersh have written up with almost obsequious reverence. He served as right-hand man to the late John Paul Vann, another American whom the *New York Times* has treated with deep respect.

Often described as the most effective civilian operative in Vietnam, Vann was widely considered the most cruel by opponents of the Saigon government. He specialized, among other things, in "black propaganda," which involved him in murder, forgery, and outright deception of the American press in order to discredit the NLF, in particular, and the opposition to American intervention, in general. For example, just before his fatal helicopter crash, Vann fed the newspapers a story about two Catholic priests said to have been executed by

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